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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HAVANA 000726

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CCA AND WHA/PD  
STATE FOR DRL CNEWLING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/03/2019  
TAGS: PREL PHUM PGOV CU  
SUBJECT: SPAIN ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIALOGUE WITH CUBA

REF: A. HAVANA 683 ("SPAIN ON THE LOOKOUT FOR SIGNS OF CHANGE")

1B. MADRID 1146  
1C. MADRID 1157

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Classified By: Principal Office Jonathan Farrar for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) COM met December 2 with Spanish ambassador to Cuba Manuel Cacho at the latter's request to discuss Spain's plans vis--vis Cuba during Spain's EU Presidency and the upcoming meeting between the Secretary and Spanish FM Moratinos. P/E Counselor separately met December 3 with his Spanish counterpart. A preview of issues that Moratinos may raise with the Secretary and other major points from both meetings follow.

CONVERGING VIEWS, BUT NOT CONVERGENCE

12. (C) Ambassador Cacho stated that the USG and the

Government of Spain (GOS) used to differ on both strategy and objectives for Cuba policy, with Spain seeking engagement and gradual liberalization and the USG seeking confrontation and regime change. COM noted that the United States is engaging with the GOC in a low-key manner on issues where we believe we can make progress, and continues to focus on improving respect for human rights. He agreed that there is opportunity for closer collaboration between the EU and United States on Cuba such as the recent (successful) approaches to the GOC to allow the travel to Spain of Elsa Morejon, wife of prominent political prisoner Oscar Biscet.

#### CLOSELY WATCHING U.S. MOVES

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¶13. (C) The Spanish Polcouns told his USINT counterpart that Spain and all of the EU countries were closely watching U.S. moves in Cuba, but dismissed that the EU would wait for further developments in the U.S.-Cuba relationship. "We have been traditionally ahead of you in engaging with Cuba," he said, "we can't afford to fall behind." He dismissed reports of new EU Foreign Minister Ashton's comments on the need to wait for U.S.-Cuba developments as "rookie misstatements."

#### MINIMAL CHANGE WITHIN CUBA

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¶14. (C) The ambassador and COM agreed that there so far has been little political or economic reform within Cuba since the passing of the GOC reins from Fidel to Raul Castro. GOC exhortations to Cubans to work harder and more efficiently reflect a military mindset but are insufficient to improve in any meaningful way Cuba,s economy. Raul increasingly has brought his people into high-level positions, which also has increased the role and influence of the military. Ambassador Cacho said the changes have made the GOC more centralized and top-heavy, and that no outsiders have access to the small circle at the top. In contrast to when Cacho arrived a year ago, now even Cabinet ministers profess to him to have little idea of future policy directions. No one has stepped into the void left by the sacking of Carlos Lage. The Ambassador sees Fidel,s influence lately to be on the rise, and even speculated that Fidel might make an appearance at the upcoming ALBA summit in Havana.

#### DO AWAY WITH THE EU COMMON POSITION

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¶15. (C) Cacho said that Foreign Minister Moratinos likely will raise with the Secretary Spain,s interest in doing away with the Common Position. The GOS feels the Common Position has failed to produce improvements in human rights in Cuba and should be replaced by a negotiated agreement between the EU and Cuba that would include human rights components. The Spanish Polcouns further added that Spain and likeminded EU

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countries see the Common Position as an irritant to the GOC, which impedes better EU-Cuba relations. Referring to the GOC,s release and exile to Spain of four political prisoners in 2007, and the release of one prisoner following Moratinos, most recent visit to Cuba, Ambassador Cacho asserted that the only human rights improvements in Cuba have come through Spain,s own bilateral dialogue with Cuba. Even those improvements were minimal, but the GOS feels the Common Position has run its course.

¶16. (C) COM asked whether the GOS believes that the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon means that unanimous consent is no longer required to do away with the Common Position. Ambassador Cacho said this remains unclear until the Council of Europe meets next April. In the meantime, the GOS,s position is that EU unity is more important than Cuba policy and thus the GOS would move only if there were no objections raised within the EU. Notwithstanding this, the Spanish are sounding much more resolute in their aims than they did just one months ago (Ref A).

CUBA WANTS A POLITICAL CHANNEL TO THE WHITE HOUSE

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¶7. (C) The Spanish Ambassador said that Moratinos also is likely to raise Cuba's interest, as reportedly expressed to him by Raul Castro, for a &political channel<sup>8</sup> to the USG, particularly to the White House. Only via such a &political channel<sup>8</sup> would the GOC be able to make major moves toward meeting U.S. concerns (note: Cacho was not in the Moratinos/Raul meeting). In response, COM ran through a list of specific issues on which we have engaged the GOC and made advances and of other areas, such as our offer to lift the travel restrictions on our respective Interests Sections, where we await concrete GOC action. The GOC should engage seriously through the existing channels. The COM noted also that the current domestic political situation in Cuba, as described above, was not conducive to grand gestures by the GOC. In a side note, Ambassador Cacho asked why the GOC had not accepted our offer to lift travel restrictions, which he felt would be to their advantage. Cuba's territory was much smaller, and the GOC would control access to GOC entities, which encompass much of Cuba's economy and societal institutions. CUBINT's potential access would be much greater. COM said that was a question better posited to the GOC; our offer remains on the table.

EU TROIKA AND CUBA: NOT AS BAD AS IT SEEMS

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¶8. (C) Ambassador Cacho said the recent Troika meeting had gone reasonably well considering the difficulty the GOC had in engaging with the Swedish Presidency. COM noted the harsh rhetoric directed toward the EU in the GOC statement issued after the talks, and asked if that masked any progress on human rights issues during the talks themselves. Cacho said no, but that the GOS was hopeful of progress during its Presidency. In the meantime, the EU internally was in agreement that there was little to gain from responding publicly to such diatribes.

CUBAN FIVE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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¶9. (C) Ambassador Cacho said he had been asked that morning XXXXXXXXXXXX to demarche the GOC to ask that they be allowed to visit their imprisoned relatives on Christmas Day as a humanitarian gesture. He was prepared to do so but was skeptical he would obtain a positive response. The ambassador asked if Perez O'Conor and Salanueva, wives of two of the Cuban Five, would receive visas to visit their husbands. COM described the history of their ineligibilities and the differences between the two cases. The ambassador noted the GOC's interest in swapping the Cuban FIVE for political prisoners in Cuba. COM responded that the vast majority of the Damas and their imprisoned relatives were opposed to any such offer.

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DOWNTWARD ECONOMIC SPIRAL

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¶10. (C) The ambassador said Cuban imports from Spain were down 38% in August, similar to the decline from other trading partners. Some Spanish exporters recently had been able to access and transfer funds previously frozen in their Cuban bank accounts but only if they agreed to invest some of these proceeds in new exports to Cuba. (Spanish demands for payment during the International Trade Fair were not well taken, and other contacts tell us that the head of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce had fallen from grace with the GOC after publicly criticizing Cuba for letting unpaid bills pile up.) Ambassador Cacho observed that the Cuban economy is in a downward spiral with no sign of when or how it might recover. His GOC interlocutors a year ago talked of increasing opportunities for small scale enterprises (paladares, etc.) and even timeshare developments, but such

talk has ceased.

COMMENT: VALUE IN COORDINATION

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¶11. (C) Despite differences in our views, we see value in coordinating with the GOS on human rights issues in Cuba both in capitals and on the ground in Havana. Spain leads a substantial bloc within the EU that favors engagement with the GOC at almost any cost but will raise human rights-related issues privately with the GOC when persuaded to do so XXXXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXXXXXX. Spain desires to speak for the entire EU when it comes to Cuba policy and is quick to reinterpret the public statements of other EU interlocutors, e.g., European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Assistance de Gucht and EU Foreign Minister Ashton, when they don't fit the Spanish line.

FARRAR